CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION WORKSHEET:
RESOURCE CONSIDERATIONS

Recreation

Crane Point Vegetation Restoration

Palouse Ranger District

Nez Perce/Clearwater National Forest

Description of the Proposed Action

The general purpose of this project is to improve overall forest health and ecological function toward desired future conditions as identified in the Forest Plan. The primary objectives of the Crane Point project are:

- Decrease current levels of insect and disease mortality to improve forest health and resiliency (maximizing old growth and large trees to the extent possible).
- Increase the amount of western white pine, western larch, and ponderosa pine and in turn decrease the dominance of root-disease intolerant species such as Douglas-fir and grand fir.
- Reduce hazardous fuels in Wildland-Urban Interface
- Harvest wood products to sustain local and regional economies.

The Palouse Ranger District of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests is proposing to implement the following actions:

Proposed vegetation treatments include (Figure 1; Table 1):

- 701 acres of commercial timber harvest (622 acres of regeneration and 79 acres of commercial thinning)
- 20 acres of Old Growth enhancement.
- 241 acres of non-commercial fuels treatment.

The following would be conducted in support of the above:

- Approximately four (4) miles of temporary roads would be constructed to facilitate vegetation treatments and would be decommissioned no later than three (3) years after the project is completed (see Figure 1).
- Road maintenance, reconstruction or improvement.
- Replace culvert on FSR 1274.

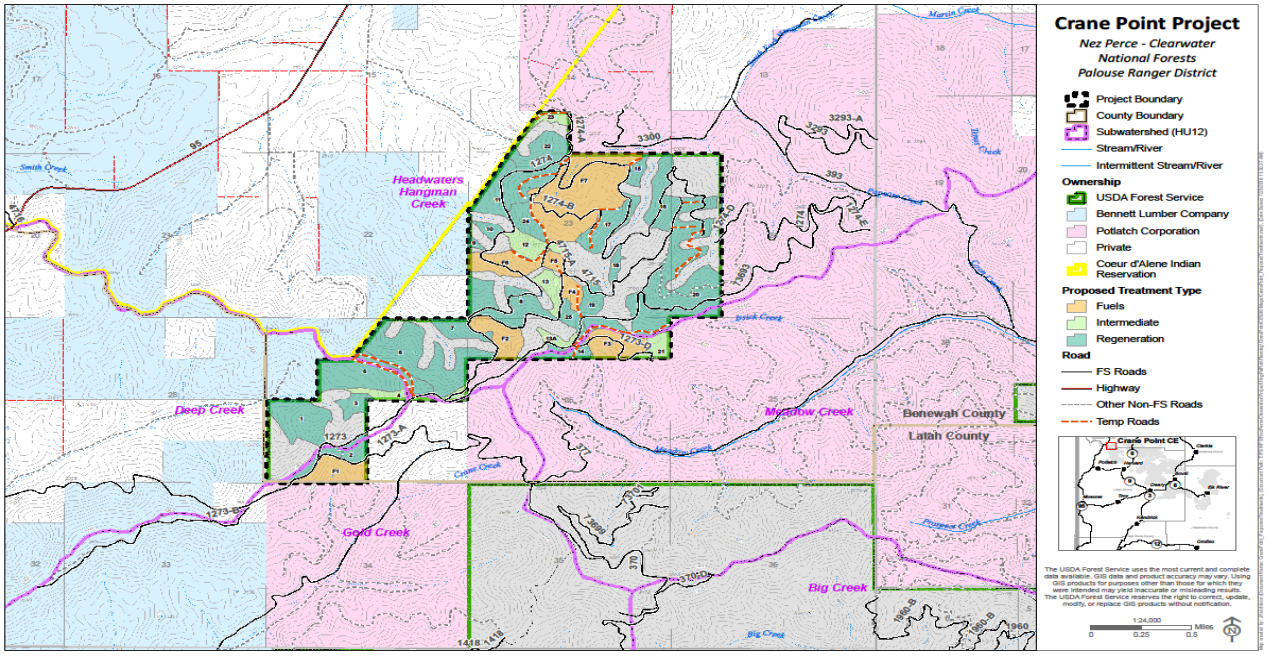
Approximately 80% of the commercial timber harvest work would be done using skyline logging systems and 20% using ground-based systems (see standard design criteria for more specific information). Timber would likely be hauled via FSRs 1274 and 1273 plus their associated spur roads.

After the trees are removed for regeneration harvest, the Forest Service is required by law to reduce slash generated from harvest and to prepare sites for planting (regeneration) within three (3) years. Regeneration includes site-preparation (site-prep), reforestation of blister-rust

resistant western white pine, western larch, and ponderosa pine, and animal damage control for pocket gophers, where present.Site prep could include:

- Slashing of sub-merchantable trees or brush
- Prescribed burning (broadcast burning, underburning, jackpot burning)
- Mechanical or hand piling and burning of slash
- Mastication of activity fuels, sub-merchantable trees or brush
- Biomass removal
- Non-commercial thinning of lower branches to reduce ladder fuel
- Leave tree preparation and pruning – to protect the leave trees during burning activities

Figure 1. Crane Point Project Area



Before and after planting, treatment for animal damage control by pocket gophers would occur where necessary. Pocket gopher populations increase post-harvest with a flush in vegetation such as forbs, grasses, shrubs and small trees whose roots supply a ready food source. Gophers damage young trees by stem girdling and clipping, root pruning, and root exposure caused by burrowing, all of which can result in a failed plantation. Reforestation monitoring (stocking exams) will be conducted after the 1st and 3rd growing seasons to ensure reforestation efforts have been successful and will determine if further planting or animal damage control treatments are necessary.

Non-commercial fuels treatments could include:

- Slashing of sub-merchantable trees or brush,
- Non-commercial thinning,
- Prescribed burning (broadcast burning, underburning, jackpot burning),
- Mastication of activity fuels, sub-merchantable trees or brush,
- Biomass removal, and
- Leave tree pruning.

Work would be done by hand and/or mechanical equipment, depending on slope. Objectives of the fuels treatments are to reduce stand density, influence species composition, and to reduce surface and ladder fuels in order to alter and reduce potential fire behavior. Multiple entries may be required to achieve the desired fuel reduction objectives.

The project proposes to decommission up to 1.5 miles of user-created trails in T43N, R4W, Sections 24, 26, 27, and decommission the legacy roads in Units 6 and 20. These roads are no longer needed for management and are inhibiting forest productivity.

A combination of silvicultural prescriptions may be used when appropriate within commercial harvest units:

- Clearcut with Reserves: retain an average of 5 trees per acre to meet snag recruitment minimums.
- Seedtree with reserves: retain an average 8-12 trees per acre to provide an additional early seral regeneration source and maintain local genetics.
- Shelterwood: retain on average 10-20 trees per acre to provide an additional regeneration source and provide shade protection for young seedlings on hot, dry aspects.
- Irregular shelterwood: retain an average 5-15 trees per acres in such a manner that trees are spread unevenly throughout the unit; therefore the area could resemble either a clearcut with reserves, seedtree, shelterwood, or even heavier retention dependent on presence of early seral species and the need for shade protection for young seedlings.
- Improvement cut: intermediate cut used to remove competition of shade tolerant species from early seral species.
- Old growth enhancement/ single tree selection: a highly selective management approach to remove competition and increase growth of older, mature, disease resistant tree species, especially western red cedar.

Table 1. Vegetation treatment types by unit

Unit	Treatment Type	Acres
1	Seedtree w/Reserves	40
2	Shelterwood w/Reserves	23
3	Clearcut w/Reserves	11
4	Single Tree Selection	18
5	Seedtree w/Reserves	61
6	Clearcut w/Reserves	76
7	Irregular Shelterwood w/Reserves	16
8	Clearcut w/Reserves	44
9	Clearcut w/Reserves	3
10	Clearcut w/Reserves	6
11	Irregular Shelterwood w/Reserves	50
12	Single Tree Selection	18
13	Single Tree Selection	14
13A	Single Tree Selection	7

Unit	Treatment Type	Acres
14	Clearcut w/Reserves	11
15	Clearcut w/Reserves	8
16	Clearcut w/Reserves	30
17	Clearcut w/Reserves	30
18	Clearcut w/Reserves	6
19	Clearcut w/Reserves	23
20	Clearcut w/Reserves	126
21	Single Tree Selection	13
22	Clearcut w/Reserves	28
23	Improvement Cut	9
24	Irregular Shelterwood w/Reserves	16
25	Clearcut w/Reserves	14
F1	Mechanical Pre-commercial Thinning and Hand Thinning	28
F2	Mechanical Pre-commercial Thinning and Hand Thinning	26
F3	Mechanical Pre-commercial Thinning and Hand Thinning	29
F4	Mechanical Treatment Below Overstory (Natural Regeneration and Brush)	10
F5	Mechanical Pre-commercial Thinning	6
F6	Mechanical Pre-commercial Thinning and Hand Thinning	28
F7	Mechanical Modified Free Thinning and Hand Free Thinning (Ponderosa Pine Plantation)	114
Total Vegetation Treatment Acres		**942**
Total Commercial Timber Harvest		**701**
Regeneration Harvest = 622 Acres / Intermediate Harvest = 79 Acres		
Total Non-commercial Fuels Treatment		**241**

Cause-Effect Relationship.

Recreation Opportunities Analyzed:

1. OHV Recreation
2. Camping (dispersed)

Cause-Effect Relationship.

Recreation Opportunities Analyzed (cont.):

3. Winter Recreation
4. Other Recreation

Proposed Action

1. OHV Recreation:A moderate degree of impacts to OHV Recreation would be expected within the project areaunder the proposed actiondue to:

- Roads within vegetation management unitswould be closed for some degree of time;
- Decommissioning of legacy roads; and
- Recreationists may have difficulty accessing valued recreation destinations.

The majority of theFS Roads in the project areawould be impacted by widespread and prolonged road closures to facilitate removal of forest products vegetation management activity.The highest level of impactswould occur on Forest Service Roads 1273 and 1274. Any impactswould be short term however,limited to the time the closures are in place.

Additionally, the proposal includesdecommissioning user-created trails andlegacy roads and construction of temporary roads. This would result in minor impacts on OHV recreation in the project area as the temporary roads would be decommissioned post-harvest and recreational access on the temporary roads would be restricted during their lifetime.

Attention would need to be placed in the development of visual screens/buffers within all units slated for logging. If visual screens and buffers are not adequate, and openings in the forest are clearly noticeable, the likelihood of additional user-created routes being created increases substantially. With the scale of harvest activity proposed, the potential for new user-created trails appearing on the landscape is considered moderate.

Planned watershed improvements from the decommissioning of legacy roads and storage of system roads would impact OHV recreation, but not to a large degree. Decommissioning would result in system roads becoming unavailable to recreationists. Many of the miles of system roads that would become unavailable are already in an overgrown state makingtheir current use,at best,difficultor even impossible.

2. Camping (Dispersed):Under the Proposed Action, there would be minimal impacts to dispersed camping within the project area. The biggest impact,dust and noise due to logging truck activity,would be short term to mid-term. Project road decommissioning and storage wouldhave minimal impacts; the roads identified under these categories,primarily used during hunting season,are lightly used for dispersed camping activity.

3. Non-motorized recreation (hiking and bicycling/horse-riding):
    a. Hiking activity within the proposed area is light and with all hiking activity taking place on the seasonally closed roads in the project area, the impact of proposed management activities in this proposed action would be minimal.
    b. Effects to bicycle/horse-rider user groups would be similar to those described above for hikers.

4. Winter Recreation: The timing of timber hauling along NF Roads would determine the potential effects to winter recreation in the project area. Summer haulingwould not affect winter recreation. With the relatively light winter recreation use in this area, the impact of winter hauling (if it is to occur at all) would be minimal. In fact, if winter haul occurs, it could potentially open up areas for additional winter recreation use in the area. With the amount of acreage proposed for harvest, a large amount of terrain would become available, creating large openings that could draw additional winter enthusiasts to the area for recreational pursuits.

5. Other recreation:

    a. Berry picking and firewood gathering: The proposed 1,350 acres of vegetation management, would result in both positive and negative impacts to these activities. Regarding berry picking, the proposed regeneration harvest and fuels activities have the potential to increase the availability of huckleberry crops, thereby providing a huge benefit to recreationists. Berry bushes have the propensity to thrive in newly opened landscapes and would likely do so in the treated units throughout the project area. As noted in the OHV section, a small percentage of roads wouldeither be decommissioned or placed in storage. This would not appreciably hinder availability of huckleberry picking areas due to their very low use at this time.

    Firewood gathering would be highly impacted under the proposed action. As proposed, the project area would become unavailable for personal use firewood gathering. It is important to note though that the project would consist of multiple timber sales. This would result in only a portion of the vegetation management work taking place in any one year, which will (to a degree) lessen the immediate impacts to firewood gatherers. Nonetheless, with the Crane Point Project site being one of the closest and most accessible firewood gathering locations in the area, impacts may be felt throughout the surrounding communities. Also, the decommissioning/storage of a small percentage of roads within the project area, would result in some loss of opportunity; however, as these roads are lightly used, any impacts due to this factor would be minimal.

    b. Hunting: The proposed action may result in a short-term impact to hunting in the project area due to the increased level of activity from timber and fuels management, including truck activity on area roads, all of which may impact the availability of game. However, the proposed timber activities have the potential to benefit hunting opportunities over the mid and long term, through the increase in early seral browse species in the treated areas, thereby increasing the likely presence of some desirable game species.

Regulatory Framework

The proposed action has been reviewed and is determined to be in compliance with the management framework applicable to this resource. The laws, regulations, policies and Forest Plan direction applicable to this project and this resource are as follows

Upper Palouse ATV Project Environmental Assessment (2005)

The Environmental Assessment implemented a district-wide restriction for the following:

1. Limiting OHVs to designated roads and trails
2. Prohibiting cross-country travel

Forest Plan consistency

Clearwater Forest Plan

The current plan that the Clearwater National Forest is working under was published in 1987. At this time, the Forest is working to develop a new plan, however, the analysis provided in this report will utilize existing information from the 1987 plan. The Clearwater National Forest Plan has a number of goals, objectives and standards that apply directly to recreation, transportation, access and roads and influences both the current and future landscape of the project area.

Forest-wide management direction for Recreation – goals:

1. Provide for a range of quality outdoor recreational opportunities within a Forest environment that will meet public needs now and in the future.
2. Provide opportunity for a broad spectrum of dispersed activities with sufficient area to maintain a low user density compatible with public expectations.

Forest-wide management direction for Recreation – objectives:

1. Provide a wide variety and range of dispersed recreational opportunities in a mix of approximately 60 percent roaded and 40 percent unroaded settings.
2. Maintain developed camping facilities to meet anticipated demand…
3. Meet 100 percent of the anticipated demand for dispersed recreation in unroaded land…
4. Manage dispersed recreational areas to maintain use within capacity as defined by measureable limits of acceptable change for the designated setting…

Forest-wide management direction for Recreation – standards:

1. Use the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) and Recreation Opportunity Guide (ROG) as guides to provide a full array of recreation.
2. Emphasize “low impact” techniques in dispersed recreational areas and continue those established for wilderness to reduce management costs and resource impacts.
3. Designate areas, roads, and tracts for off-road vehicle (ORV) use in accordance with management area goals and standards…
4. Include analysis of the trails to determine whether to abandon or retain; and if retain, whether to relocate temporarily or permanently when conducting environmental analysis in areas that contain system trails.
5. Regulate use of roads, trails, and specified areas along with designating areas for ORV (Off-road Vehicle) use as per Executive Order 11644, through the Clearwater National Forest Travel Planning Direction…and in conformance with the ROS designations for specific areas.

E1 Prescription (Timber producing lands): 7,130 acres within the project area are ~~encompassed~~ in this prescription.

Goal: Timber producing land managed for healthy timber stands to optimize potential timber growing. Timber production is cost effective and provides maximum protection of soil and water quality. Manages big game, primarily elk, through limited road closures. Provides dispersed recreation and livestock grazing if compatible with timber management goals (Clearwater Forest Plan, page. III-57).

Applicable Recreation goals and standards include:

1. Manage a roaded natural setting for dispersed recreation.
2. Manage areas seen from Management Areas A4, A5, and A6 to meet the adopted VQOs shown in Appendix G.

ApplicableFacilities Management goals and standards include:

- Goals:

  Manage for all levels of difficulty of ORV use on trails.

  1. Regulate use of roads and trails (to motorized vehicles) where needed to accomplish wildlife, watershed objectives, or property values. Manage seasonal and year-long road closures to provide security for elk to meet area objectives.

- Standards:
  1. Design and develop road systems in accordance with area transportation plan procedures.
  2. M2 Prescription (Riparian Areas): Inclusions.

Extraordinary Circumstances

No extraordinary circumstances need to be considered for the recreation resource.

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